

**Written Submission for the Special
Committee on Afghanistan**

By: Mariam Balouch

List of Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** That the government extends the special immigration and private sponsorship programs to include Afghans currently living in Afghanistan
- **Recommendation 2:** That the government waive the requirement of acquiring refugee status for Afghans to qualify for immigration
- **Recommendation 3:** That the government implement an EMERGENCY program which provides an expedited process for Afghans both inside and outside of Afghanistan to immigrate to Canada
- **Recommendation 4:** That the government extends the eligibility of Afghans who qualify for these special immigration measures to include *all* at-risk Afghans, such as those who worked for the government, musicians, police officers, non-profit organizations, athletes etc.
- **Recommendation 5:** That the government remove the restriction imposed on private sponsors for the Group of Five program to allow private sponsors to sponsor more than 1 family within the one-year time period specified by IRCC
- **Recommendation 6:** That the government work with their allies such as the USA and Qatar to facilitate evacuation flights for at-risk Afghans from Afghanistan to another country for immigration into Canada
- **Recommendation 7:** That the government develop an evacuation list similar to the US Evacuation List which allowed Americans to provide the information of at-risk Afghans to their member of Congress which was forwarded to US Department of State for evacuation

Submission

Trying to get at-risk Afghans out of Afghanistan has proven to be impossible with the Catch 22 the Government of Canada has created through IRCC: You need to be outside of Afghanistan and have refugee status (which can take over a year to obtain from UNHCR) to immigrate to Canada. However, to travel outside of Afghanistan, you require authorization from the government- which you cannot obtain without being outside of Afghanistan. This is not a logical solution and greatly impedes the opportunity for any Afghan to safely immigrate to Canada.

The US government is working with Qatar Airways to charter flights of Afghans waiting for evacuation into Qatar where they can complete their consular processing and travel to America. This is a good option for those whose lives are at risk when passing Taliban checkpoints to cross the border. They do not require a passport to get on a plane since they will complete their processing at an embassy outside of Afghanistan.

Please see attached article by the Washington Post:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/02/04/afghan-refugees>.

During the mass evacuations, Canadians with family and friends at risk in Afghanistan were abandoned by our government. Our MP's were not available, neither was the embassy and not one of our emails to the government received a reply during the federal election. We were left hopeless and had to turn to the US government for assistance. The US Congress was collecting information of loved ones in Afghanistan to compile the US Evacuation List which was sent to the US Department of State for evacuation. Many were left behind with hope they will still be evacuated as the US government is still facilitating evacuation flights from Afghanistan. We recommend the Canadian government look into these options, if possible and provide an explanation on why recommendations (if any) cannot be implemented.

The "Special Immigration Program" is open to all applicants, not just Afghans and faces significant delays due to the pandemic. We implore the Government of Canada to implement an EMERGENCY program for Afghan nationals as soon as possible and provide safe passage for Afghans leaving Afghanistan.

U.S. to accelerate processing for Afghans evacuated to Qatar, but thousands more remain in limbo

By [Karen DeYoung](#) and [Abigail Hauslohner](#)

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The Biden administration plans to expedite processing of at-risk Afghans it continues to evacuate to Qatar, allowing many of them to enter the United States as refugees or special visa holders with a clear path to citizenship, administration officials said.

The program, which officials said would begin next month, comes as the administration has faced criticism for the sluggish pace of evacuations and a worsening humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan since the U.S. withdrawal in August.

Tens of thousands of Afghan evacuees entered the United States last year under an emergency system of humanitarian parole, which allowed for quick transit but has left them with only temporary legal status.

Prioritized Afghans evacuated aboard future U.S.-chartered evacuation flights from Kabul are to receive the expedited processing at the U.S. air base in Doha, Qatar, and direct transit to U.S. resettlement within 30 days. And most of them will enter the United States as refugees or with Special Immigrant Visas, both routes providing a fast track to citizenship. Administration officials said funding for the expansion of U.S. processing facilities and personnel will come out of an additional \$1.2 billion in resettlement assistance authorized earlier this week by President Biden.

At the Qatar base, officials said, they plan to be able to collect biometric data and health assessments, conduct security screenings, process interviews, and arrange travel all in one place, a departure from the usual refugee processing system that can take years.

“We’re trying to do it all simultaneously,” said a senior administration official, one of several who discussed the plans on the condition of anonymity while they are still being finalized.

Some of the newly approved money will also go to fund-strapped resettlement agencies, and to take over waystations, established at U.S. domestic military bases during the August flood of evacuees, that the administration is trying to phase out.

There are about 7,000 Afghans on the U.S. bases awaiting resettlement, officials said. The Defense Department has already closed a number of these intermediate “safe havens” and would like to eliminate the rest by spring.

The new program is unlikely to quiet the concerns of resettlement agencies, veterans’ groups and lawmakers who have been lobbying the administration to do more to rescue Afghans left behind and to provide more certain standing for the parolees. Under the conditions of their entry, they have two years from arrival to apply for asylum or Special Immigrant Visas — both difficult and severely backlogged processes — or risk losing work permits and possible deportation.

The agencies and groups, along with a number of lawmakers, have also pushed for the administration to extend the parole program to Afghans who have arrived in third countries, with or without the help of the U.S. government, or to expedite their refugee applications made from abroad.

“There should be no difference in how we treat an Afghan evacuee, whether they got on a private charter flight to Albania or whether they got on a U.S. military flight to Doha,” said Rep. Tom Malinowski (D-N.J.), who is among several Democrats to have expressed frustration with the administration. “All of these people were counted when the administration boasted about the numbers they helped evacuate. And just because somebody got on plane A, rather than plane B, should not result in different treatment.”

Administration officials said the immediate goal is to speed up the processing of the still-lengthy list of Afghans it has prioritized for evacuation who are still in Afghanistan. They include eligible family members — spouses and minor children only — left behind in the hectic August evacuation, and those with already-approved Special Immigrant Visas. Also deemed priorities are U.S. embassy or other U.S. government agency employees, and those Afghans the administration has determined are especially at-risk or deserving.

“We aim to process Afghans as SIVs or refugees whenever possible, rather than utilizing humanitarian parole, which will allow the majority of remaining Afghan evacuees the ability to arrive in the United States with a more durable immigration status,” the senior administration official said. Some details of the refugee processing plan were first reported by Axios.

The official said the new program would aim to process about 2,000 refugees and Special Immigrant Visas per month from Doha, with the hope that that number would be balanced between the two. The refugee admissions would count toward the existing 125,000 worldwide refugee cap set by Biden for the 2022 fiscal year.

With Afghanistan’s commercial airports still largely closed, Qatar — which is handling U.S. diplomatic interests in Afghanistan — is among the few countries the now-ruling Taliban has allowed to land charter flights for evacuation. Qatar Airways planes chartered by the U.S. government continued at a rate of one or two a week during the fall but stopped at the beginning of December amid a Taliban-Qatar dispute before resuming with one flight last week. Each flight carries about 300 people, and last week’s brought the total number of Afghans currently in the Doha facility to about 500.

Even two flights a week is too little, according to advocates who estimate that there are between 80,000 and 100,000 Special Immigrant Visa applicants alone still in the country. Some had been waiting for years for their applications to be processed but were unable to reach the airport during the chaotic, two-week U.S. withdrawal in August, when luck, rather than prior service or proper documentation, appeared to be the determining factor in who got on a U.S. evacuation flight.

Many are now in hiding across Afghanistan as the country plunges into famine and economic crisis and the Taliban and vigilantes continue to target those with ties to the United States. Thousands of others, including former civil servants, members of the U.S.-trained Afghan military, female activists and journalists are also at risk, advocates say.

“Priority one is saving people’s lives, because if they’re killed by the Taliban or they starve to death, no other measure is going to matter,” said Rep. Jason Crow (D-Colo.), who launched a bipartisan working group last year to push the administration to do more to rescue Afghan allies before the U.S. withdrawal in August.

The Department of Homeland Security said last week that about 36,831 of more than 70,000 Afghans admitted under

humanitarian parole from the August evacuation have either applied for SIVs or are expected to apply.

As for new efficiencies planned in Qatar, the senior official said the program could function as a sort of template for more major overhaul. “I’m very hopeful that what we set up in Doha ...[could] lead to broader and sweeping efficiencies in the U.S. refugee program” for Afghanistan and beyond, the official said.

For others, the changes remain too slow in coming. “I think there’s still lots of good people working on this,” Malinowski said, “but it’s sluggish and not, in my view, keeping with the administration’s commitment that the August evacuation would continue, even if our troops were no longer physically on the ground.”

By [Karen DeYoung](#)

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